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Moral impact of Islam on humanity

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Islam contributed enormously to humanity through advancements in all fields of learning. The impact of Islam on human civilization can be divided into the two areas of moral and intellectual impact. A careful examination of both provides insight into the sophistication and advancement of Islamic culture.

Life is important and the values of life are even more important. Values are guiding principles, or standards of behavior, which are regarded as desirable by a civil and just society. They are what we use to guide our interaction with others, with our friends and family; they guide our behaviors in the communities of which we are members, in businesses and in our professional behaviour.

Ethical values carry the concepts of moral standards, moral responsibility and moral identity. Moral standards are associated with behavior; moral responsibility refers to our conscience, and moral identity refers to one who is capable of right or wrong action. When embodied by human beings, they serve to:

- Ensure fair play and harmony between individuals;
- Help us to be good people in order to enjoy a good society; and
- Keep us in a good relationship with the power that created us.

Ethical values are the very essence of every philosophy of life. A Chinese proverb says that if there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in character; if there is beauty in character, there will be harmony in the home; when there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation; when there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.

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Islam fully recognized the extraordinary importance of values in human life. It not only endorsed the ethical values propounded by earlier religions, but also added to their depth and beauty. It provided the spiritual basis and intrinsic motivation for sublime values. Islam touched the deep recesses of human psyche not only to cleanse it from the dark shadows of anger, envy, greed and other negative human attributes, but also to illuminate it with the light of patience, love, mercy, self-sacrifice and personal dignity.

God Consciousness: The Islamic Revolution had a profound and lasting impact on the psychological and sociological aspects of human existence. Before the advent of Islam, philosophy and religion (with the exception of Christianity) had not left a very deep impact on human life. Generally speaking, individual and social behaviour were not greatly influenced by religion or philosophy.

Mostly, people believed that God, after creating the universe, had become unconcerned with and indifferent to worldly affairs. Either they were devoid of the fear or love of God, or the fear and love of God were not viable creative forces in fashioning their lives. Most of the teachings of Greek philosophy had a negative conception of God's attributes and they scarcely mentioned God's infinite mercy, love and forgiveness, whereas history illustrates that no positive culture or civilization can be built upon bleak constructs and morbid attitudes.

Islam delivered humankind from the deadly knowledge and sick Gnosticism of Greek philosophy. Islam introduced a God that permeated body and soul and could be felt in every drop of blood. The God of Islam is the most Beneficent and Merciful, the Sustainer and the Protector, Peace-giving and most Majestic. We have been commanded to inculcate His attributes and dye ourselves in His colour, for His is the best colour (Quran, 2:138).

The conception is that God is the Master of, and absolutely operates, the universe and that He provided a consciousness of life, wherein God is a living reality. Faith in God became intrinsic to human life, flowing within them like the life-sustaining blood in their veins, illuminating their hearts and enlightening their minds. Consequently a pious, dignified and graceful version of humanity emerged that was steeped in His consciousness and love. The Quran reflects this in the following verses:

- But as for him who feared standing before his Lord, and restrained himself from impure evil desires and lusts'. (79:40)
- It is only those who have knowledge among His slaves that fear Allah'. (Quran 35:28)
- Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware'. (Quran 49:13)

Same consciousness was explained by the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), when a person once asked him, 'O Messenger of Allah! Give me some advice'. The Prophet (PBUH) replied, 'I advise you to fear Allah because it is the head of everything'.

Moral Courage: Spiritual consciousness provided the believer with exceptional will-power and equipped him with the idea of self-criticism, a continuous drill to rectify one's mistakes and failings. It gifted him with Nafs-i-Lawwama (the ever repenting conscience) that pricked him whenever he did a wrong thing, and prevented him from doing evil even in the secluded corner of darkness. This consciousness prompted people to present themselves for punishment by confessing that they had committed a sin. This self-evaluating moral thinking led to the highest standards of trustworthiness and integrity, giving rise to piety and decency that was maintained both in public and private life. It became difficult for human beings to submit to forces other than Allah. The emperors, the scholars, the wealthy, all behaved as humble creatures of God. The majesty and grandeur of Allah delivered humankind from the yoke of all these earthly gods. All worldly beauty, grandeur of the royal courts, paled into insignificance before Allah's awe and grandeur.

History also witnessed that an ordinary Arab stood eyeball to eyeball with the Roman and Persian Emperors. Hazrat Sa'ad Ibn Abi Waqqas sent Rabi Ibn Amir as his envoy to the court of Rustam of Iran. When he reached the court, he found it well-decorated. The crown was bedecked with pearls and rubies. This poor man was clad in simple dress, riding a weak horse. He treaded over the velvets and carpets of the royal court. He was not awed and overwhelmed by the grandeur of the court of Rustum, until he entered the inner court, piercing the carpets with his spear. He went straight to Rustum and tethered his horse to his royal pillow and said: We have been sent by Allah to rid His men from the slavish bonds of their fellow men and make them the slaves of none but Allah. And to

take them out from this narrow, limited world and make them enter the vastness of the world hereafter, and deliver them from the oppression of false religions and bring them under the just rule of Islam (Ibn Kathir).

The highest moral rectitude, indifference to wordily possessions, love of Allah and longing for Akhirah (The Hereafter) made the Muslims courageous. They were overwhelmed by longing for Paradise and looked down upon the worldly life and its material things with contempt and disdain. They were so much obsessed with the great ideals of Islam that they became forgetful of all around them.

دو عالم سے کرتی ہے بیگانہ دل کو

عجب چیز ہے لذت آشنائی

It makes the heart indifferent to both the worlds; strange is the taste of intense love for God. (Iqbal)

Longing for Death: Hazrat Anas Ibn Nazar joined the battle of Uhad. On one occasion while he was advancing towards the enemy, he saw Hazrat Sa'ad Ibn Ma'az and addressed him: 'Sa'ad! By God, I can feel the fragrance of Jannah (Paradise) from the other side of the mountain of Uhad.' Then he disappeared into the battling crowd. Ans Ibn Malik said that when the war was over, they found more than eighty wounds on his body and it was mutilated beyond recognition. His sister identified him by his fingerprints' (Bukhari wa Muslim).

On the eve of Uhud, when the Prophet persuaded his followers by saying 'And hasten for the pardon of your Lord, and paradise extending over the heavens and the earth' (Quran, 3:133), Hazrat Umar Ibn Hammam al-Ansari, one of the companions asked: 'O, Messenger of Allah! Is it extending over heavens and the earth?' The Prophet replied, 'Yes, do you have any doubt?' Al-Ansari replied that he did not doubt it; rather he had an ardent desire to be blessed with it. The Prophet said, 'Yes, yes, you will get it'. Al-Ansari was eating dates at that time. He threw away the dates asking why should he waste his time; he joined the battle and was martyred (Sahih Bukhari) Iqbal expresses this clearly.

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By showing you the face of your friend (God) in the mirror of death, He makes life more difficult for you to live. (Iqbal)

Self-surrender: Pious thinking makes a Muslim surrender completely and submit himself to Allah. He gives up his personal desires and ambitions and becomes God's bondsman. He hands over his life and property to Allah. If he wages war, it is for His sake and if he makes a truce, it is also for His sake. And if he loves or hates, it is only to seek His pleasure.

Fudala Ibn Umair came to kill the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), while the latter was circumambulating the Ka'bah. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) asked, 'What are your intentions?' He replied, 'Nothing'. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) smiled and advised him to repent. Then the Prophet (PBUH) put his hand on his chest. Fudala says that the moment the Prophet (PBUH) lifted his hand from his chest, Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was the most beloved of all. He further narrates that on his return, he met a woman he had often flirted with before. She invited him to sit together as usual and enjoy her company. He rejected her invitation and told her there was no room for flirtation now that he had accepted Islam and submitted to Allah (Jawziyyah).

Ma'rifah: Man's true understanding of God and his attributes, his profound consciousness of life's beginning and end, and a clear-cut action plan to lead a proper life gave him an intuitive knowledge of the reality which rescued humankind from the irrelevant and sterile search for any other philosophy or theology. His energy and vigour remained intact and protected, thus available for pursuing noble goals. Muslims used these energies in their temporal and religious affairs and created a marvelous civilization, blending moral values with material comforts.

Ma'rifah (Gnosis) of God is of two kinds: cognitional (ilmi) and emotional (ha1i). Cognitional gnosis is the foundation of all blessings in this world and in the next. The Quran says: I only created the jinn and mankind that they might serve me. (51:56)

Ma'rifah is the life of the heart through Allah, and the turning away of one's innermost thoughts from all that is not Allah. The worth of everyone is in proportion to Ma'rifah, and he who is without Ma'rifah is worth nothing. Ma'rifah is in reality Allah's providential communication of the spiritual

light to the hearts of humanity. Allah, in His Mercy, illuminates the heart of man and keeps it from contamination so that all created things have not even the worth of a mustard-seed in his heart (Syed Ali Hujwiri).

Collective Responsibility: The Islamic consciousness stressed the concept of a collective responsibility. The difference between Islam and most other religions is that it did not content itself with merely establishing acts of worship and abandon the needs of society to a temporal governing body. Rather, Islam established ways of conduct, and relationships' rights and obligations for the individual vis-a-vis members of his family, community and the nation and for the nation vis-a-vis other nations. The Quran declares:

- And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends one of another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. (Quran 9:71)
- Hast thou observed him who belieth religion? That is he who repelleth the orphan, and urgeth not the feeding of the needy. (Quran 107:1-3)

The Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) said: The faithful, in their love for one another and in their having mercy for one another and in their kindness toward one another, are like one body; when a member of it ails, all (the parts of) the body call one another (to share the pain) through sleeplessness and fever (Sahih Muslim).

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) further illustrates this fundamental distinction of Islam: Every one of you is a shepherd, and every one of you will be questioned about those under his rule: the ruler is a shepherd, and he will be questioned about his subjects; the man is a shepherd in his family, and he will be questioned about those under his care; and the woman is a shepherd in the house of her husband, and she will be questioned about those under her care. Thus, every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for those under his care (Bukhari).

The Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) has given a beautiful illustration of the duty that society is responsible for the individual's behavior in this parable: The example of the person abiding by Allah's order and restrictions in comparison to those who violate them is like the example of those

persons who drew lots for their seats in a boat. Some of them got seats in the upper part, and the others in the lower. When the latter needed water, they had to go up to bring water (and that troubled the others), so they said, 'Let us make a hole in our share of the ship (and get water) saving those who are above us from troubling them'. So, if the people in the upper part let the others do what they had suggested, all the people of the ship would be destroyed, but if they prevented them, both parties would be safe (Bukhari).

We are commanded to help both, the oppressor and the oppressed. To help the oppressed is to rescue him from victimization and to help the oppressor is to restrain him from doing injustice. Allah's Apostle said: Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or he is an oppressed one. People asked, 'O Allah's Apostle! It is all right to help him if he is oppressed, but how should we help him if he is an oppressor?' The Prophet said, 'By preventing him from oppressing others'. (Bukhari)

Love's Focal Point: Humankind found a role model in the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), who could be the focal point of their everlasting love and affection. Love is a divine sentiment whose tremendous force manifests itself in a thousand ways in this physical world. There is not a single object in the world, which does not carry its impression.

This sentiment of love was lost in worldly grandeur and pomp and show. For centuries, humanity remained deprived of a human personality that could be object of its love, until it found a perfect model of beauty, power and dignity in the form of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), who became the focus of mankind's attention and love. One who saw him from a distance was awed and overwhelmed by his personality, and when he met him at a close distance, he loved him.

I quote a few verses from a eulogy (na'at) of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) by Saadi Sheerazi: Human dignity found its perfection in his personality. The light of his beauty removed the darkness. He was the embodiment of the highest virtues. Allah sends His mercy upon him and his descendants.

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A woman of Ansar, whose father, brother and husband were martyred in the battle of Uhud, came out of her house to inquire about the safety of the Prophet Mohammed. 'I want to see the Prophet', she said. When she found out that he was all right, she exclaimed that if he was safe and sound, then all pains and sufferings would be easy to undergo (Ibn Ishaq).

When Khubayb, a companion of the Prophet (PBUH), who had been persecuted was tied up on the scaffold, prepared for hanging, a nearby man spoke: 'Tell me, would you not prefer that Mohammed (PBUH) were here in your place to receive this last punishment, while you were at home with your people'? He answered, 'No, I certainly prefer that Mohammed (PBUH), be where he is, safe from all harm'. They all laughed it off (Ibn Kathir).

Urwah Ibn Masu'd Thaqafi (Quraysh's envoy to Treaty of Hudaiybiah) upon his return from Hudaybiyah said to Quraysh, 'O men of Quraysh, I have visited Chosroes, Caesars and the Negus in their respective courts. By God, I have never seen a King who is so much loved, honoured and revered by his colleagues as Mohammed (PBUH) is by his followers. So much so that when he asks them to do something, they scramble for the orders to be carried out and they save the water with which he performs his ablutions. When he speaks, they lower their voices as a mark of respect and out of respect, they cannot cast full glance at him, (Jawziyyah).

In Islam, humanity found a point to focus their love and an altar where they could sacrifice their high emotions and express their natural feelings and sentiments. The people were secured from emotional chaos. New traditions of love and obedience were set up. The creative activity of passionate love came into play and it scaled great heights and left ever-lasting effects on human culture and civilization. And, finally, love conquered the whole world.

Personal Dignity: The psychological and moral factors brought about changes in human conduct and behavior. Mankind was revived and its dignity and honour restored. Latent capabilities surfaced. A great humanistic revolution changed the Arab nation, the most backward and illiterate at that time. Umar, who was a shepherd became, Umar the Great by virtue of this education and training, and amazed the whole world by his towering personality. He became the role model of Taqwa (piety and God's consciousness) and administration. Khalid Ibn Waleed was an ordinary

youth, who conquered Rome and became known as the Sword of God. Abu Ubaidah had a soft heart, but forced Herakal to leave Syria. Amr Ibn al-Aas was an ordinary wise person, who became the Governor of Egypt. Sa'ad Ibn Abi Waqqas was an ordinary man, who conquered both Iraq and Iran in the War of Madain. Salman Farsi, the son of a slave family, became the ruler of his own country Iran, but lived in a hut. Hazrat Ali, a man of small stature turns into a great scholar and jurist who became the source of knowledge and wisdom for the succeeding generations.

What was all this? How did it all happen? It seems as though the wires of Dawah (preaching) and love were spread and then made into a current of faith (iman), running through the community of believers, lighting dead hearts and soon brightening the whole world. This greatness, this force was a beneficence of Islam on humankind. It revolutionized both individuals and the communities. It turned herdsmen into rulers. This metamorphosis of human life from shepherds to rulers was extraordinary and exemplary.

These and other great men also made remarkable contributions to the community. They became the standard-bearers of justice and truth. Their personal desires and their worship (ibadaat) did not hamper them from dispensing justice. They kept away from worldly gains and shunned positions of power. But when they were forced to accept public responsibility, they treated it as a sacred trust (amanah). They did not represent any particular race or area. They were interested in the well-being of the whole of mankind. They upheld human dignity and honour.

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